

MAKING DEATH IN THE DISCHARGE OF DUTY.

An Unvarnished Narrative, by Edward Francis Long, U. S. Internal Revenue Department

ONE rarely hears of the dangers that beset the path of the Government agent in the arresting of crime.

This fact, more or less, is responsible for the popular impression that his duty consists of little more than the discovery and running down of the wrong-doers, who surrender meekly upon sighting his badge of authority.

While this might happen in some few cases, in the majority there is always present an element of danger that at no time can be discounted, danger that at all times you must be prepared to grapple with and overcome by wit or force that your end may be gained.

The man in the Government service who would stop to figure on the danger of each undertaking and the likelihood of his meeting injury or death in its pursuit, would soon find himself in a position where he could look for some nice quiet way of earning a living or become a public charge on his community.

These things are never spoken of in the services. They are taken as a matter of course, just as the fireman takes the risk of life as part of the day's work, a railroad brakeman, or any man who works at calling regarded as hazardous. Insurance companies recognize this fact and place certain lines of work at a much higher rate than would be called for were it not for the unusual risk encountered.

I am not particularly desirous of setting forth this or that occasion when my life was threatened, or plotting what the novelists would call my "hair-breadth escapes." It is only for the purpose of giving the general reader a proper perspective of the work of the silent Government agent and the many obstacles that he must of need overcome, that induces me to relate a few of my personal experiences on the "danger line."

Serving as a Spotter.

My first year or two in the service was served in the capacity of a "spotter" or "shadow." That is, my duty was to follow various persons named or pointed out by those over me, or keep careful watch on some house in which suspects were quartered. To the casual observer this line of work would seem more or less free from danger. I had some such notion in the beginning and was only disillusioned when brought face to face with the real conditions.

I had been placed on a case which involved the watching of a stable, smuggling and a lot of cheap dives, sailors' boarding-houses, warehouses and a general riff-raff of dilapidated buildings, at a point near the East River, where gangs of notorious toughs were wont to congregate. A rather seedy suit of working clothes, a greasy hat, and a no-nonsense clean face constituted my disguise when I took up my watch.

My work was to watch the wagons going in and out of the place, and if possible, to ascertain the nature of any goods removed from the premises, in the hope of finding smuggled opium. My first two nights the day watch being taken by another operative, were free from anything worthy of comment. The policemen on the beat kept suspicious eyes on me when they made the rounds, which were not frequent, and on several occasions I was admonished to move on. These orders I always meekly obeyed, until they were out of sight, when I again resumed my post.

I had made frequent visits to the various dives and purchased cheap whiskey to such an extent that if I had imbibed the same, I would not be writing this now. Hot coffee, or what masqueraded as such, and poorly cooked food, had been mine for 10 or 15 cents at a cheap eating-house nearby. I was trying to make the eyes of the night loungers of the vicinity familiar with my face and figure that I might go about at will at my work without being hampered by suspicions.

Good Cigar Almost Proved Fatal.

Then a thing happened which taught me ever after to be most careful of the slightest detail, that nothing in one's work was too small to be overlooked. It was on the third night of my vigil when I was carelessly lounging in the doorway of a restaurant, that a slouching, tough-looking young fellow walked my way and passed me a foot or two, only to wheel suddenly around and look at me intently. I thought little or nothing of this at the time, figuring that he probably took me for an acquaintance until he got a better look. The incident was sufficiently unusual, however, as to impress the features of the man on my memory.

An hour later I made my way to one of the adjacent dives to get more mixture of colored spirits soft as whiskey. I had hardly raised the glass to my lips, taking good care to spill most of its contents unseen, when my eye encountered the same young man holding a whispered conversation with several bad-looking characters in a far corner of the room. They dropped their eyes when my glance rested on them, and pretended to be interested in something in another end of the saloon. Then one of the older ones, looking up, and still hiding my eyes fixed on them, whispered something to the others, whereupon they began gradually to draw near me, with the apparent object of taking my attention at the bar for liquid refreshment. I dared not make a move to show my suspicions and waited with trepidation for some indication of their intentions. The place was filled with rough cut-throats, most of them roustabouts and river rats, who held life very cheaply, when the life concerned was not their own.

My first friend began to look me over very carefully when they had taken their places. Apparently, determining on a course of action, he leaned over, while leaning at me, and said:

"Say brother! Yer snokin' mighty good cigars for a bum skater!"

Fear had a tight clutch on my heart as I realized that I was holding a freshly-lighted perfect between my teeth that would not have been sneezed at by a connoisseur, and I had all I could do to prevent it falling to the floor. I thought quickly and, with the assumption of a slight swagger, jerked out:

"I guess I can smoke a hand-out from some swell without being dirty with money, can't I?"

With the others, he glanced at me maliciously as he replied, with a sneer: "Dat's supposed yer swell friend give yer a box of de fancy smokes. You was biting one off when I saw yer by de rag store. You may be a fly cop and you may not, but yer had better blow—we don't like yer looks."

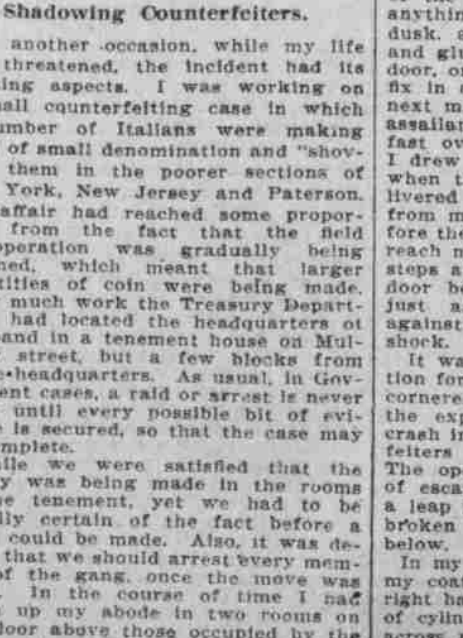
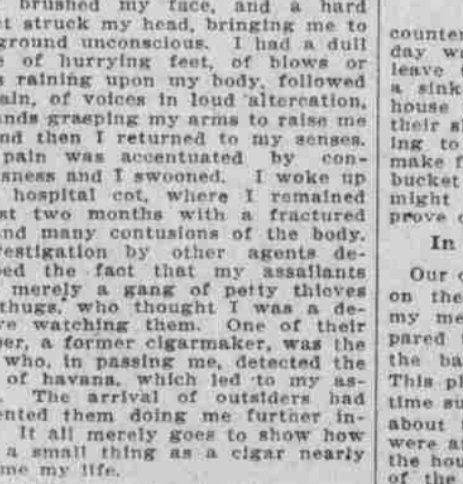
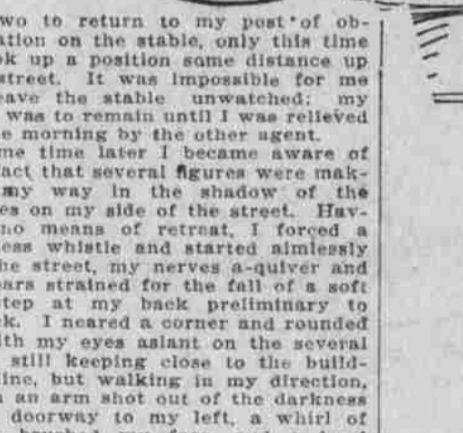
The bartender, a good-natured Irishman, had listened to this dialogue, and taking in my youthful face and appearance, winked at me broadly and said: "Chase it, son, chase it. Th' boys won't hurt ye if ye do it lively."

No Chance of Escape.

Taking this as a cue, I muttered something about a man not being able to take a peaceable drink and walked out slowly, only to quicken my pace when I gained the street. I dived into a narrow alley and coming out of the other end, stood in a shadow for a short time to see if I was followed. Then I walked through a dark street



LIGHTED ONE OF THE CANNON CRACKERS.



I HAD A DULL SENSE OF HURRYING FEET OF BLOWS OR KICKS RAINING ON MY BODY

or two to return to my post of observation on the stable, only this time I took up a position some distance up the street. It was impossible for me to leave the stable unwatched; my duty was to remain until I was relieved in the morning by the other agent.

Some time later I became aware of the fact that several figures were making my way in the shadow of the houses on my side of the street. Having no means of retreat, I forced a careless whistle and started aimlessly up the street, my nerves a-quake and my ears strained for the fall of a soft footstep from the other agent.

Investigation by other agents developed the fact that my assailants were merely a gang of petty thieves and thugs, who thought I was a detective watching them. One of their number, a former cigarmaker, was the man who, in passing me, detected the odor of havanna, which led to my assault. The arrival of outsiders had prevented them doing me further injury. It all merely goes to show how such a small thing as a cigar nearly cost me my life.

Shadows Counterfeiters.

On another occasion, while my life was threatened, the incident had its amusing aspects. I was working on a small counterfeiting case in which a number of Italians were making coins of small denomination and "blowing" them in the poorer sections of New York, New Jersey and Paterson. The affair had reached some proportion from the fact that the field operation was gradually being widened, which meant that larger quantities of coin were being made. After much work the Treasury Department had located the headquarters of the band in a tenement house on Mulberry street, but a few blocks from police-headquarters. As usual, in Government cases, a raid or arrest is never made until every possible bit of evidence is secured, so that the case may be complete.

Our case was drawing to a close and on the night in question several of my men were stationed outside, prepared to shadow various members of the band as they left the building. This plan had been followed for some time successfully. I had been walking about the street to see that the men were at their posts, and upon entering the house decided to listen at the door of the counterfeiters' room to see if anything was doing. It was after dusk and I stopped in the darkness and glued my ear to the crack of the door, only to feel a pair of bony hands fix in a clutch about my throat.

The next minute I was grappling with my assailant, whose superior strength was fast overcoming me. With one hand I drew my revolver to use as a club, when the door opened and a well-dressed man, in passing me, tossed the first member of the gang could reach me and leaped up the stairs four steps at a time, or open and slam my door behind me and throw the bolts just as the crowd came running against the door, which shook with a shock.

It was a particularly ticklish situation for me. Unarmed and alone I was cornered in a couple of rooms, with the expectation of seeing the door crash in at any minute as the counterfeiters threw themselves against it. The open windows offered no chance of escape, unless I should indulge in a leap that would land me a mass of broken bones in the street five floors below.

Death Menace on Two Sides.

While I can look back with amusement at an adventure like the last there has always been one affair through which I passed that chills me whenever I think of it. For melodramatic quality I have often thought that it would eclipse the efforts of some of our modern playwrights, who build plots around locomotive wrecks, automobile crashes, burning tenements, shipwrecks, cyclones, powder explosions and other stirring features.

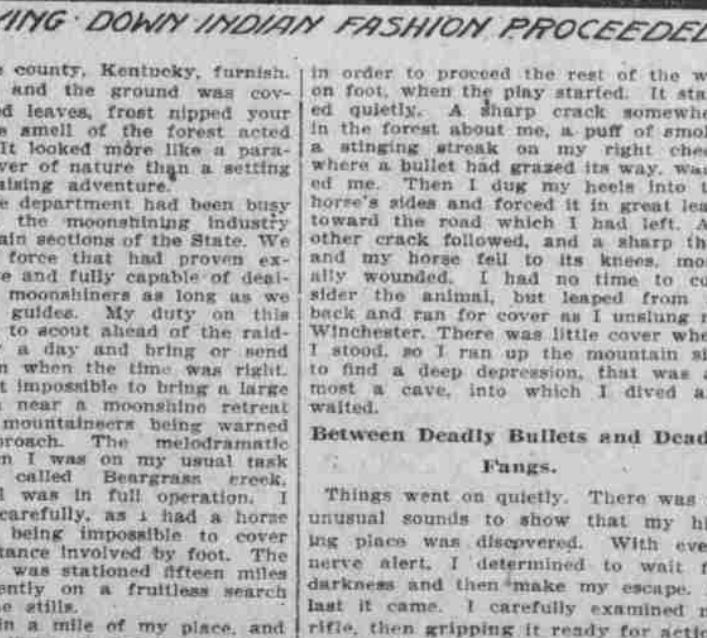
It all began very quietly in the rather pleasant surroundings that the mountain

cannon crackers that a friend had jokingly presented me with that afternoon and I had kept them with the intention of taking them home to the children. It has been often said that in an extremity a man will attempt anything. It was perhaps this condition that suddenly inspired me with a plan that in my cooler moments I would never have thought of. The hinges and lock on the door were fast giving way to the continued attacks and I could hear various Italian oaths hurled at my head and the threats that were being made on my life. It was at this juncture that I lighted one of the cannon crackers and running hastily into my second room, the transom of which opened on the stair that led below, threw it into the hall beneath. For a second or two I waited breathlessly, then there was a loud explosion. On the instant the noise at the door ceased and I could hear the band retreating hastily down the steps. The next minute I had hurled the remaining cannon crackers into the street below, where they exploded loudly, and was calling out to pedestrians in the hope that my men would hear me or have their attention attracted.

Then I went back to the door to listen. I dared not venture into the hall unprepared to shadow leaping foot-steps, a sound of scuffling, a pistol shot and several loud cries. A minute later I recognized the voice of one of my men and I dashed down the stairs to find the three agents in charge of the counterfeiting den and five prisoners, and all their paraphernalia. It need hardly be said that I was glad to see my companions, who laughed heartily at my freerack celebration.

Between Deadly Bullets and Deadly Fangs.

Things went on quietly. There was no unusual sounds to show that my hiding place was discovered. With every nerve alert, I determined to wait for darkness and then make my escape. At last it came. I carefully examined my rifle, then gripping it ready for action, I stepped cautiously out and started to



Lying Down Indian Fashion Proceeded to Crawl.

descend. A small rock became dislodged by my foot and made a slight noise and on the instant there were flashes from three directions and as many bullets splattered on the rocks about me. With the leap and bound I sprang toward the entrance of the hole and was about to grope my way in when I felt something whip against my boot and the blood-chilling warning of the rattlesnake struck my ear. I was so numb with fear that I merely stumbled into my retreat to stand weakly, while gaining control of my nerves.

And so I stood hour after hour. Not daring to rest for fear of surprise by the moonshiners or the bite of a snake. I thought the dawn would never come. At last faint gray streaks marked the sky, then sheets of daylight pierced through, birds twittered, and a flood of light brought some measure of relief. I looked vainly for the snakes, for not until the sun came out and I heard them moving did I discover the nest at the side of a large rock to the right of the entrance. I sat down, almost exhausted, to think of some means of escape, but none came. To rush forth meant certain death, as the moonshiners were dead shots. To try it at night meant the same thing, as they surrounded me on all sides. Why did not they do something? What did they mean by waiting so quietly? Then it came to me like a flash. They meant to starve me out.

With the thought, pangs of hunger seized me and made me despair more than ever. I will never forget that day and the night that followed. Feverish from lack of food and sleep, my tongue parched and swollen for water, my eyes constantly resisting efforts to keep them open, there I lay during the hours of the day and there I stood in the dark until another day had dawned, not daring to go out for fear of death by bullet or snake-bite, hardly daring to remain for fear of death by starvation, yet buoyed up by the hope that something would permit me to live on.

When the second day had struck I was almost crazed and determined to

die one way or the other. The cunning that is sometimes displayed by the insane came to me, and I divested myself of my clothing, which I proceeded to stuff with dead leaves that were thick on the stony floor about me. Finally, it assumed the proportions of a human form. Then, placing my hat on the collar and fastening a strong branch of a tree under the back, I extended it forth from the mouth of the entrance to see how many shots would answer its appearance. I waited and waited in silence, not a rifle crack. Again and again I thrust it forth, with the same result.

Then, pulling it back, I hastily dressed and, lying down Indian fashion, proceeded to crawl out, meanwhile keeping a sharp lookout for the snakes. Gaining the cover of some shrubbery, I set out on a reeling run in any direction, so that it was away from the place that I had spent two days and nights of horror. I never knew how it all happened. I know I stumbled into the door of a cabin crying for food. I know an old man and woman placed me in front of a log fire and put some hot liquid in my mouth, which I greedily swallowed, and then the nightmare stopped. When I again fully regained my senses, I was still in the log cabin with a couple of my fellow agents, about me helping the old woman to administer to my wants. She had been doctor and nurse in one, and to her my life was due. She had little liking for revenue men, but that maternal instinct in a woman which

leads her to pity the distress, had made her take me in.

When I was stronger I learned that, after waiting for my return for two days, the men had set forth to see what had happened to me, and, incidentally, to make a raid if possible. Arriving at the creek they had found the place deserted; the moonshiners having learned of their approach. Then they set out scouring the neighborhood in the hope of finding some clue to my whereabouts. This explained to me the desertion of the moonshiners, which had permitted my escape.

I rarely look back on this occasion when I faced death in three different forms, unless it is to remember that a rough old woman by the mountain took an enemy in and administered unto him and restored him to life.

Teacher—may I go out to Tommy? Teacher—That is unnecessary, Tommy. You can sneeze in here without disturbing anybody. Tommy—I guess you never heard me sneeze.

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